

Remarks Honoring 2012–2013 NCAA Championship Teams
March 10, 2014

Hello, everybody. Hello! Hey! Everybody, have a seat. Look it: She's taking selfies. [Laughter] Sit down. [Laughter] Sit down. I caught you. [Laughter] Well, I've already said hi to everybody, so I'm going to keep my remarks pretty short.

Welcome to the White House. It is nice to be outside for a change, and spring break is under way for a lot of schools, and so we thought this was the perfect time to invite a bunch of college kids over to wreak havoc on the White House. What could go wrong?

This is an incredible group. I had a chance to meet many of you earlier. We've got golfers. We've got runners. We've got soccer players. We've got everything in between. We've even got some volleyball-playing Anteaters. [Laughter] And the West Virginia rifle team is here, although the Secret Service is not sure whether we checked them before they came in. We've got the Minnesota women's hockey team, which includes a few players who competed for Team U.S.A. in Sochi. Yay!

We've got three schools that sent a pair of teams here today. The Tar Heels, we've got women's lacrosse and women's soccer. For Princeton, we've got fencing and field hockey. For USC, we have men's and women's water polo.

We've got a lot of champs here today. I want to make sure everybody gets their due. So on the women's side, let's give it up for the Kansas track and field team, the Oklahoma softball team, the Stanford tennis team. And on the men's side, we've got the Alabama golf team, the UC—Irvine volleyball team, Colorado cross country, Duke lacrosse, Indiana soccer, Oklahoma cross country, Virginia tennis, and the Yale hockey squad.

Now, no matter what sport you play and no matter where you come from, for the rest of your lives, every single one of you is going to be able to call yourselves a national champion. And you know that a title like that means not just performing your best when the spotlight is on and the game is underway, but also pushing yourself even harder when nobody is watching: dragging yourself out of bed for early morning weight-lifting sessions and gutting out the preseason two-a-days. It means cracking the books, I hope, on those late-night bus rides home and making sure to leave time to study when everybody else is out having fun. And it means that after practice, when other folks might turn off the lights and head home, you ask the janitor to keep the lights on so you can run another drill—or two or three.

And that's the championship spirit that we're celebrating today, not just the trophies in the display case back home, but the drive and the toughness and the teamwork that put them there.

And at a time when legendary conferences are being reshuffled and too many schools have been forced to cut sports, athletes like all of you remind us that at their core, college athletics are supposed to be about a lot more than just network ratings. They're about the shy freshman who develops into a team captain, the underdog who learns how to play in the spotlight and learns how to slay the giant, the role player who fights through an injury to play on Senior Day. It's about playing a game that you love, even if you're not on a full scholarship or even if the only folks cheering you on are your mom and dad. And at their best, college sports teach us about giving back to our communities.

So athletes from these teams have spent time visiting local children's hospitals, volunteering with the Special Olympics, and speaking to young people about bullying. You've helped raise awareness for efforts like Habitat for Humanity and Read Across America and LGBT rights.

And that's the kind of ethic that shows, this is not just about winning, it's about learning how to lift other people up. That's what makes a true champion. And that's what will serve you well no matter what path you choose in the years ahead, whether as a coach or an athlete or a doctor or a teacher or an entrepreneur. Our country needs young people like you to keep giving your best and to keep bringing out the best in those around you. That's how we keep making progress and moving forward. And that's why we're all looking forward to seeing what all of you accomplish in the years ahead.

And I'm particularly proud of two things. One, it's traditional to bring football and basketball teams here. I think that for all these outstanding athletes and sports, it's important to acknowledge that your investment and time and effort and dedication is just as significant. And you may not always be on television all the time, but what you guys do is remarkable, and you are truly great athletes.

The second thing is, I can't tell you how proud I am of the young women here. There was a time when college women's athletics was relegated to second status. And all of you here are showing the incredible strides that we've made over the last couple of decades. And it means that Malia and Sasha and my nieces, they all know how important athletics is in their lives. And you guys have really paved the way. So we're really proud of you for that.

I want to congratulate all of you on your championship season. I hope that you guys enjoyed your time at the White House. I want to wish all of you the best of luck in the time ahead. For those of you who are returning, coming back, good luck next season. And for those of you who are graduating, Godspeed.

All right? I hope you guys had a good time. Take care of yourselves. Congratulations.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Megan Bozek, Gisèle M. "Gigi" Marvin, Anne Schleper, and Lee Stecklein, defensemen, and Amanda Kessel, forward, 2014 U.S. women's hockey team. He also referred to his nieces Leslie Robinson and Savita and Suhaila Ng.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : 2012–2013 NCAA Championship teams.

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